

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
19 October 2025

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Fruit of PEACE Sunday (Communal/Relational)

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“We Belong to Each Other”

Third Sermon in *Cultivating the Fruit of PEACE*
Part of *Abide & Grow: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*

NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.

John 20:19-23; Acts 16:35-40; Philippians 1:1-2

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Mother Teresa received the Noble Peace Prize in 1979 because her daily life bore the fruit of love and peace—she tenderly cared for children and adults who were shunned and dying from HIV/AIDS, leprosy, tuberculous, malnutrition, and more. She saw in each face, The Holy. She cared for each body as if it were her own child. She encouraged each troubled heart as if they were her friend.

I remind you of her life before I quote to you her words because when we see someone who bears the Fruit of the Gospel in their life—day in and day out—we can trust their insight because it is grounded in lived experience; this is not naïve or wistful inspiration, it is wisdom.

Mother Teresa believed that in loving those we are in relationship with and proximity

to, we promote peace in the world. She said:

“Today, if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other...If everyone could see the image of God in [their] neighbor, do you think we would still need tanks and generals?”¹

We Belong To Each Other.
This is truth.

As we progress in our exploration of the Fruit of Peace, today we look at how we practice the Fruit of Peace in relationship with one another, that is, how we cultivate peace with those we interact with in our daily lives. It’s this relational peace, I believe, that is the bridge that connects our personal, inner peace to a wider global, systemic peace. We cannot get across that divide of personal peace to global peace any other way. We cannot jump

¹ <https://www.littlewithgreatlove.com/we-belong-to-each-other/>

this chasm from personal spirituality to global change. We must build the bridge between the two with our daily lives and walk over this bridge...day by day, conversation by conversation, interaction by interaction. As Diana Butler Bass says, *“Bridges are pretty miraculous structures...they connect what was separated; they provide for safe passage over dangerous terrain...Bridges make things possible things that were impossible.”*²

Today, three scriptures show us what might be possible in terms of growing the fruit of inter-relational Peace in our daily lives. In each text we are reminded how We Belong To Each Other.

1. In Facing Fear and Bridging Division—We Belong to Each Other.

2. In Insisting on Accountability and Offering Apology—We Belong to Each Other.

3. In Greetings of Grace and Peace—We Belong to Each Other.

² Diana Butler Bass, “Sunday Musings: Bridge the Chasm NOW,” *The Cottage* (27 Sept. 2025), accessed on October 19, 2025 at <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/sunday-musings>.

First, In Facing Fear and Bridging Division—We Belong to Each Other.

In his gospel account, John reminds us that Easter evening had an eerie feel to it. The disciples are huddled behind locked doors for “fear of the Jews.” This, by the way, should not be read as an anti-Semitic sentiment. Remember, Jesus was a Jew and the disciples were Jewish and the author of this gospel was a Jew writing to Jews! As Greg Garrett puts it, *“When we encounter passages about ‘the Jews,’ [in John’s Gospel], it’s essential that we remember that this Gospel grows out of a family feud between people who have been in relationship [with each other for a long time] and now [have disagreements with each other about core understandings in their faith and politics]. You and I know that family feuds are the worst and most hurtful. We say things we shouldn’t. We vilify and demonize those we have loved—and may still love—for disagreeing with us now.”*³

The division in the Jewish community according to John’s

³ Greg Garrett, “‘For fear of the Jews’: Confronting Christian anti-Semitism,” *Baptist News Global* (18 February 2021), accessed on October 19, 2025 at

gospel is that it seems “the Johannine community of Jews had been forced out of the synagogue (or synagogues) for proclaiming Jesus as the liberating King they were awaiting, the hoped-for Messiah,”⁴ and that’s why there is a division in the Jewish community.

This was a family dispute or congregational conflict (we might say) about people who are at odds with people they care about because they are fighting over how they understand their faith and how it impacts stuff in their life, like their politics. Anyone relate?

It’s hard to know who is locking who out (or in) here. Whether the Jews (Jesus’ disciples) behind the closed doors had locked themselves in because they were afraid of the Jews on the outside of the door OR if the Jews on the outside of that room had locked the door from the outside, for fear of the Jews (Jesus’ disciples) inside that room.

The point is this: When we “lock ourselves in” protecting Us from Them, OR when we lock away Others to keep Them

from hurting Us...Jesus comes and stands in the doorway of our divides and says, “*Peace be with you.*”

Jesus teaches us how to face our fears with Breath. With Presence. And even with an Action Step!

In the midst of our tension and fear—Jesus appears and stands in the gap and shows us how we move forward to get beyond it. Since we’re almost in the holiday season, I like to think of it this way: Jesus shows us how to go into the kitchen and fill our plate with food and sit down at the holiday table with “Those” Family Members and *be present* in the midst of the tense conversations. Jesus could have called out sick to this family gathering. He had after all, just been crucified, been dead in a tomb, and resurrected. He had been through it! He could have taken a pass for this one but he didn’t. He showed up to the Gathering. To the Room. To the conversation. To the Tension. To the Fear. He showed up To The People He Loved and the People he knows He Belonged To and With.

<https://baptistnews.com/article/for-fear-of-the-jews-confronting-christian-anti-semitism/>.

⁴ Garrett, *ibid.*

The presence of Christ created a bridge in the midst of the fear and division.

Listen to how poet Rosemerry Whatola Trommer illustrates such a gift in her poem “Bridge Impressions”:

*Imagine if, instead of a wall,
we built a bridge between us,
a bridge made of every door
we ever locked, every carpet
we did not lay down for each
other,
every fear that's kept us
from saying hello.
I want to take the risk
to walk toward you
as through a sparkling sky
entranced by the scent
of greenening all around—
want to pause with you
mid-bridge and notice how
it can be so beautiful,
this place between us.⁵*

Imagine... We Belong to Each Other.

So first, We Belong to Each Other by Showing Up in the Tension. We do not know if we will be a bridge yet or not, but we won't know if we are not there. So we show up. We do not avoid conflict. No matter how strongly the Algorithms of

Social Media want to lock us away in our echo chambers of like-mindedness and belief, Jesus invites us to show up in the places where difference and division create friction and fear. We do not turn away. *Especially* if we have a “privileged safety” in whatever the fear-filled situation is. Some folks cannot show up safely right now in places of tension. For example, for those who have the privilege of lighter skin and U.S. citizenship, we can show up to ICE detention centers and speak up about how it is contrary to God's peace and Jesus' way of love to lock up people who have brown skin or Hispanic last names or who are born in certain countries.

There are many ways to work through the complexities of our immigration policies. Taking people away from their families and locking them up is not humane or ethical or peace-full. Denying due process is not loving others as we love ourselves, and it is certainly not loving God. As Colorado Senator Julie Gonzales said on Thursday at the Interfaith Immigration Network Rally, “[As we have heard from our Christian, Jewish, Muslim

⁵ Quoted in the blogpost mentioned above by Diana Butler Bass.

siblings—and their sacred texts], standing with immigrants is not an act of charity. It is embodying the core of our faith. It is not optional in our traditions; it is essential to what it means to be a person of faith.”⁶

So in our families and in our communities, we show up AND then, Jesus shows us, we *speake* *peace*. This is a diffusing gesture by Jesus. We do not know his tone of voice here, but context clues reveal he’s probably not shouting “PEACE BE WITH YOU!” He’s probably speaking peace with his tone and demeanor too. We all know the difference it makes when we match someone’s heightened or tense emotion with a calm response. Not that we have to hide our emotions (there are times to yell for sure!), but when we center ourselves in Christ’s peace, we speak with power no matter our volume. Anyone trained in de-escalation knows that as long as we are yelling back and forth, we will not hear one another. Our cortisol levels are too high. We physically can’t listen for understanding when we are riled up and afraid or screaming. So

we do what we can when we are emotionally regulated to help emotionally regulate situations that feel heated.

Then, Jesus shows them his wounds. In the context of it being Easter evening, this makes sense. The Risen Christ wants his disciples to know he is an embodied person, whose wounds and scars still tell his story even as he rises to new life. All parts of our story matter, and this is part of the path of peace too. Being able to show our full selves to one another and be seen and accepted.

At this point, the disciples get excited and start rejoicing. And what does Jesus do now? Jesus speaks Peace (not just into their fear but) into their *excitement*, perhaps tempering it a bit. For just as God has sent Jesus to the world, so now is Jesus sending the disciples into the world to also be bearers of this message of peace too. And it's risky business that requires courage.

At this point, Jesus literally breathes the Spirit on them (*pneuma*)—which is reminiscent of how the Creator God breathes

⁶ Quote taken during the Interfaith Immigration Network Rally in Denver, CO on October 16, 2025 by me on my phone as I listened at the rally.

the Spirit (*ruach*) into dust to create the first humans. Or how the prophet Ezekiel breathes the Spirit of God (*ruach*) over dry bones in the valley, bringing them back to life. In this moment, Jesus, the Risen Christ, is breathing his disciples back to life. They are huddled, dead in their divisions, dying in fear and uncertainty and worried about those “on the outside” and Jesus steps in and breathes life and peace into them once again, reminding them of their life force and shared humanity.

And then he gives them the action step—the instruction to forgive. We can imagine, of course, that Jesus is speaking about forgiving those that they fear. Forgiving those who do not understand who Jesus is. Forgiving those who called for Jesus to suffer and die, forgiving those who crucified him. And yes, even forgiving themselves because some of them in that room had betrayed Jesus, lied that they knew Jesus, denied Jesus, ran away from Jesus, and fell asleep on Jesus. Peace with others and peace with ourselves does not come without forgiveness. Forgiveness is like the mortar between all the bricks that we lay on any bridge to peace.

Of course, we know how the story ends. Those who were hiding behind closed doors end up taking this new life, this calling and Spirit, and they spread the love and peace of Christ and they ultimately give their lives for this faith. They put their lives on the line for what they believe. Will we? For the sake of Christ’s peace?

As author Robert Fulghum writes, “*Peace is not something you wish for, it is something you make, something you are, something you do and something you give away.*”

We Belong to Each Other by Breathing and Being and Speaking Peace and by literally Standing in the Division and Gaps and Divides that are Killing Us—and We Create a Bridge...however we can. A Presence of Peace can breathe life into places where it seems like all is lost. And it’s not an immediate thing. It takes effort and time. It’s a “slow burn,” you might say...or really, “a slow bridge!”

C.S. Lewis was taken with John 20’s presentation of Jesus’ breathing the Holy Spirit onto his disciples. He wove that image into the final scene of his first Narnia chronicle, *The Lion*,

the Witch, and the Wardrobe
writing:

I expect you've seen someone put a lighted match to a bit of newspaper which is propped up in a grate against an unlit fire. And for a second nothing seems to have happened, and then you notice a tiny streak of flame creeping along the edge of the newspaper. It was like that now.

For a second after Aslan had breathed upon him, the stone lion looked just the same. Then a tiny streak of gold began to run along his white marble back—then it spread—then the colour seemed to lick all over him as the flame licks all over a bit of paper—then, while his hind-quarters were still obviously stone, the lion shook his mane and all the heavy, stony folds rippled into living hair. Then he opened a great red mouth, warm and living, and gave a prodigious yawn. And now his hind legs had come to life. He lifted one of them and scratched himself. Then, having caught sight of Aslan, he went bounding after him and frisking round him whimpering with delight and jumping up to lick his face.⁷

It's a text that really does proclaim: "Behold, I make all things new."⁸ We make things

new by breathing and being
Peace in the midst of Tension
and Fear and Division.

Second, In Insisting on Accountability and Offering Apology—We Belong to Each Other.

In Acts, the Apostle Paul refuses to let "a blessing of peace" from the magistrates (i.e., those in power who have unjustly put him in prison) be a cover or dismissal of their injustice. Paul does not let the people who put him in prison get away with not acknowledging what they have done. His courage reminds us that peace is not just a feeling, nor is it the absence of tension. Peace requires courageous conversations and accountability and apology.

Here is the context for Acts 16:

Paul and Silas had been thrown in prison for healing someone in the town in the name and power of Christ. The people who brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates accused them saying, "*These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to*

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Colliers, New York, 1970), pg 165. Illustration referenced in Scott Hoezee, "John 20:19-23 Commentary," *Center for Excellence in Preaching* (31

May 2020), accessed on October 19, 2025 at <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2020-05-25/john-2019-23-2/>.

⁸ Hoezee, *ibid*.

adopt or observe.” The crowd also joined in attacking them, and essentially without any evidence or trial (i.e. no due process), Paul and Silas are flogged, mocked, beaten and thrown in jail.

Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns to God through the night, and there is an earthquake and it shakes their shackles loose and they could go free, but they do run. They stay put. They know it will be a risk to the jailer if they leave. In this moment of false accusation and *even with a chance at freedom*, they remember that they belong to one another—even *to the one who is jailing them*.

In fact, they befriend the jailor and go to the jailor’s house, who is so thankful that they didn’t flee the prison, and the jailor feeds them and washes them up, and in turn Paul and Silas end up sharing God’s peace and love with them and baptizes the one who jailed them and his whole household. After this very long night, perhaps as they were having breakfast, that is when our passage for today picks up with the magistrates sending the police to deliver the message

that says, “*you may go now, and you may go in peace.*”

Probably feeling bad about how they treated these two guys the day before, the magistrates sent their policemen to the jailer to release Paul and Silas assuming they would shamefully retreat, but Paul won’t have it, essentially saying, “You know what you did is wrong, but you don’t know *just how wrong* you were!” Paul and Silas were Roman citizens! And they had been beaten without trial and thrown them into jail. Paul stresses this point and then demands that the magistrates themselves come and bring them out.

When the magistrates learn that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were afraid. They assumed because they were Jewish, ethnically and culturally, that they were not Roman citizens. They assumed wrong. They treated these guys poorly thinking it was okay because they were “foreigners” and not “one of them” but they were wrong. It turns out *they* were the ones who had broken the law and stood condemned, **not** Paul and Silas.⁹

⁹ Terry Baxter, “Two Potential Options: Acts 16:35-40,” *Daily Bible Commentary of GoServ Global* (Nov. 1, 2023), accessed on October 19, 2025 at

<https://goservglobal.org/2023/11/01/two-potential-options-acts-1635-40/>.

As one commentator put it, “Keep in mind, Philippi was a retirement community for Roman soldiers. Suddenly the [grave mistake] of the magistrates was on open display. The whole city [was riled up and] deeply indebted to Paul and Silas.”¹⁰

The magistrates had not treated their fellow citizens well or justly. Perhaps you’ve heard of “cheap grace” which is the idea that you can just do whatever you want and ask for forgiveness and it’s “good with God?” Well, in a sense, Paul is advocating against “cheap peace” here. We do not get to act with violent actions and unjust behavior against other people, and then just assume that by saying “*you can go now, peace be with you,*” that all is okay.

Paul has the privilege of Roman citizenship and he uses that privilege to stand up for justice in a moment when the Ones in Power just wanted to speak peace and just “let the past be the past.” Paul says, “No, You need to come face us and talk to us and dismiss us publicly, not privately.” Paul demands that

they release them outside, so the people and the city can see and hear the public apology and accountability. Paul asks them for something a non-citizen would not be safe asking for, I think, to hopefully change how ALL accused people are treated in the future.

In this moment of attempted “peaceful dismissal,” Paul reminds us that it is in and through Accountability *to one another* that we Belong to One Another. This is what we might call a “teachable moment” about how accountability is tied to justice and justice is tied to peace. Peace is not the absence of tension. It is the presence of *shalom*, which is the Hebrew word for peace that has a meaning of wholeness, completeness, and full well-being. There is no *shalom* when human beings are unjustly treated. No matter what the people in power say or how they are interpreting the law of a country, when we follow Christ, we all have a higher law that we follow—to love neighbor as we love self. To treat one another fairly, justly, with dignity and humanity.

¹⁰ Baxter, *ibid.*

Paul reminds these in power that We Belong to Each Other in Accountability and Apology. Power does not excuse us from apology. In fact if we have power and privilege, we have greater responsibility to those in our care. And there is great power in apologizing when we have caused wrongs.

Even as the one who is suffering in this text, Paul is able to remind the most powerful and even the ones who oppress him that We Belong to Each Other. Not just because we share the citizenship of a country, but because we are all beloved children of God, and are all recipients of God's grace.

Part of living the Fruit of the Spirit of Peace is asking for Accountability and Apology from leaders. That is asking for a whole peace, not a partial peace.

And this text reminds us that when *we are the ones* who make a false accusation or do something wrong, we must not send someone else to "apologize for us" or more likely, we must not just "sweep it under the rug and not talk about it and pretend it will go away." We must not say, "well my intent was peace so even though my action was

hurtful, so 'go in peace.'" No. When we are held accountable by another, we can create peace in ourselves by apologizing and facing our mistakes. And we can give the gift of peace-filled repair in relationships when we apologize and own up to what we have done.

We Belong to Each Other in how we Hold Each Other Accountable and keeping each other Accountable is a large part of what creates *lasting* peace in our homes and societies and hearts.

And Accountability begins with ourselves first!

Perhaps you know the story told about A.J. Muste, a pastor and civil rights activist and life-long pacifist who, during the Vietnam War, stood in front of the White House night after night, for *years*, holding a lighted candle.

Rain or shine, in the last years of his life, Muste stood outside the White House, night after night—after spending his daytime hours building coalitions of antiwar groups—conducting "a one person protest" with his lit candle.

One very rainy night, a reporter asked him, “*Mr. Muste, do you really think you are going to change the policies of this country by standing out here alone at night with a candle?*”

“*Oh,*” Muste replied, “*I don’t do it to change the country, I do it so the country won’t change me.*”¹¹

Muste’s candle was a reminder to himself WHO he was accountable to. In Insisting on Accountability We Belong to Each Other. For all of you who sometimes feel alone in your protests against injustice, or for those of you who wonder if being one of the millions of protestors at the No Kings Rally’s yesterday matters—it does. It matters because we are called to hold leaders accountable. And it matters because we are called to hold ourselves accountable too, and remember that we, too, are leaders and peace-makers in the every day moments of our lives. We light our candles to remind ourselves of our divine spark and the divine spark in others.

And this leads us to our final text and reminder for today.

Third, In Greetings of Grace and Peace—We Belong to Each Other.

In Philippians, Paul and Timothy remind us that the blessings of peace we give to those we work and fellowship with are rooted in the abiding grace and peace of God.

How we greet one another matters. It sets a tone. When we walk into work each morning and see our colleagues. When we walk through the doors of our homes after a long day at work. When we send a text or answer a call. When we sign an email. When we speak to kids and when we speak to elders. When we comment on a post from someone and address them personally, trying to add a bit of ‘incarnation’ to an otherwise dis-embodied online space...How we greet one another matters—it is a signal, before we say anything else, of how we view the person to whom we are speaking. It reminds them (and us) Who They Are and Whose They Are.

“Grace and peace” is found in some form at the beginning of all of Paul’s epistles. In his letters, Paul coins a short phrase

¹¹ I was reminded of this story from this post:
<https://www.ericksonmedia.com/holding-the-candle/>.

that holds key theological and identity markers.

Grace, or *cháris* in the Greek—graciousness, goodwill, favor, or thanks—might have sounded to a first-century person like a standard greeting in Greek, but Paul used it as a way of naming our spiritual condition as well. We are ones in need of grace who receive grace. Paul grounds us in God’s deepest gift to all of us, and offers this greeting as a reminder of both everyday thanksgiving for what the people he is writing to have done for him AND as a reminder to himself and his addressees that they are all recipients of God’s grace and provision and mercy.

Then, Paul takes another step to extend a gesture of inclusion to those to whom he is writing. He combines the word grace with the Hebrew greeting *Peace eirénē* (which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *shalom*), which means more than just an absence of conflict, it encompasses completeness, welfare, wholeness, and flourishing.

Paul creates a uniquely inclusive greeting that honors Jewish tradition and Greek culture and a theology of God’s grace.

As one person reflected, “Paul didn’t try to make the Greek believers lose their distinct cultural identity. Nor did he require Jewish believers to drop their rich heritage. In this lovely greeting, we see Paul’s brilliance and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit by using salutations that both groups would find familiar.”¹²

“Paul didn’t compartmentalize either group by addressing them separately. Instead, he sought to lift them to a new height, a new way of relating to people from different backgrounds and different cultures. The beginning of this radical and beautiful concept was always in the heart of God, and the ground is level at the foot of the cross. The gospel should transform not only how we love and relate to God, but also how we love and relate to one another!”¹³

Even more, there is another layer to the “Grace and peace” greeting. It is a brilliant reworking of Aaron’s blessing

¹² Cathe Laurie, “Grace and Peace,” *Virtue The Blog*, (28 Sept. 2015), accessed on October 19, 2025 at <https://virtue.harvest.org/grace-and-peace/>.

¹³ Laurie, *ibid.*

in Numbers 6:24–26. For over a thousand years, Israel’s priests had blessed the people by asking that God would “make his face shine” upon them, “be gracious” to them, “turn his face” toward them, and give them “peace.” By starting all his letters with grace and peace from God and the Lord Jesus, Paul reaffirms this priestly blessing from the Hebrew scriptures.¹⁴

And there’s one more “hidden message” in this greeting. Paul and his readers and the early church believers were living in a Roman Empire which was all about the *Pax Romana*, which is Latin for “Roman Peace.” Rome promised that Roman dominance was the greatest, most peace-giving rule. A kind of “peace by the sword,” so to speak. So by using this greeting of peace very intentionally, Paul is communicating that “peace from the Lord Jesus Christ” was the embodiment of true *shalom*, and this is a greater and truer “peace” than any *Pax Romana* promise from Caesar. Peace does not come from oppressive power, but from the liberative love of God.

And, by the way...Paul’s letters include a lot of direct and forceful instructions and unambiguous moral reminders to his churches that they are not living as Christ taught them to live. But before he ever offers teaching or correction or even shows his anger and frustration, Paul always begins with a greeting of blessing. A reminder of shared belonging to one another. A blessing of grace and peace.

How we greet one another matters; it sets a tone...and circling back to the first text, it gives us direction for our own lives of how to be peace-makers in our relationships because the order of this greeting, Grace and then Peace, reminds us that if we do not begin with thanksgiving and gratitude for the blessing of our own forgiveness and the forgiveness we extend to others...then we will never achieve peace. It is only when we offer grace to each other and accept God’s grace for ourselves, that then we are poised and positioned for peace in our relationships.

As Eckhart Tolle says, “*You find peace not by rearranging*

¹⁴ Andrew Wilson, “Paul Put His Own Stamp on the Ancient Pattern of Opening and Closing Letters,” *Christianity Today* (Sept. 2023), accessed on October 19,

2025 at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2023/08/andrew-wilson-paul-letters-open-close-grace/>.

the circumstances of your life, but by realizing who you are at the deepest level.” Paul uses his letter greetings to do just that. He reminds us Who We Are and Whose We Are and he tells us in this one phrase about two of the greatest gifts of our faith: Grace and Peace.

As a Peaceful Presence, in Bridging Division, we remind each other we belong to each other even when we fear each other.

As a form of Peace-filled Protest, in Insisting on Accountability and Offering Apology, we remind each other we belong to each other, even as we hold different positions of power and privilege.

As a way to speak the peace we long to see, in Greetings of Grace and Peace, we remember we belong to each other by blessing each other.

Taken together, these three texts remind us that Peace *in our relationships* is inextricably connected to the justice-related peace we advocate for in the world and the centering peace we cultivate within ourselves.

And ultimately—We Belong to Each Other because We Belong to God.

Which is to say, *it is because* We Belong to God that We Belong to Each Other.

When we remember We Belong to Each Other, we will practice peace. And when we practice peace, the world will know we (and they) Belong to God.

Amen.